Reflections On the Life of Negroes
In Newark - 1910 - 1916 - Feb. 16-1972

An address delivered to the Frontiers Club February 16-1972.

Mr. President and Yokefellows.

This is Negro History Week. Jim King asked me if I would talk to you tonight on the life of negroes in decades past because he knew that for more than sixty years I have been associated with this city sometimes in a very intimate manner.

I suspect that some of you are wondering - and not without good reason - why I have chosen such a short time - six years, 1910-1916 to talk about us when the fact is that our ancestors have been citizens here for full three centuries.

Well, I have what I believe to be a perfectly logical reason for restricting the time span. In fact, there are three reasons.

One. Until 1916, life among us here was a rather staid, even and unexacting thing. In three centuries we had developed a pattern of getting along, and it seemed to work very well for us. There was little of going across the line and mixing with whites except in a condescending or patronizing manner. There were discriminations, prejudices, restrictions, prohibitions. These were sometimes a little deeper than being merely superficial. But they never penetrated themselves to the depth of "race hatred". We had an accomodating tolerance of one another.

Two. For much of that period 1910-1916, I lived in Newark. It was the period between which I had graduated college at Lincoln University and before going off to Yale University for furthering my education. I was, I believe, the only young Negro at that time who had finished from a reputable college. Furthermore I had a good job, I was a waiter in the W.B. Day Restaurant.

These two things combined gave me a tremendous advantage: People deferred to me in manners of respect far in excess of what I deserved. But I was alert and I observed all ~~that~~ was going on about me, much of it I am sure sank in very deep.

Three. In 1916, life in Newark for every one changed dramatically. The war in Europe was on. We would soon enter it. Newark, with its diversity of manufactories, was called upon to produce a vast variety of war materiels. Our factories needed new workers. Thousands of Negroes came to Newark to fill industrial needs. From that moment this city has never ceased changing in race relations.

The Census of 1910 gives 9475 as the Negro population of Newark. Where did they live?

I. Negroes were scattered in large and small patches all over the oldest part of the city.

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Looking at a city map one can easily identify the street on which they lived. For instance, beginning in the Ironbound, one would see patch I

(1) Olmer, South, Thomas, Pennington, East Kinney, Chesnut.
(2) Congress, Union, Prospect, New York avenue,
(3) The Island, Lockwood, Esther,
Skipping across the railroad.
(4) Vanderpool, Miller, Emmett, Astor, Sherman, Brunswick
(5) Mulberry, Camp, Scott, Kinney, Elm, Cottage, Beach, Austin, Tichenor.
(6) West Kinney, Halsey, Nevada, Beecher, Washington, Longworth, Crawford, Coe's Place, Marshall, Plane, Baldwin.
(7) Shipman, Arlington, Augusta.
(8) Quitman, Monmouth, Somerset, West, Barclay, Broome, Charlton, Prince, Spruce, Waverly, Boyd, Livingston Morton, Kinney.
(9) Norfolk, Rankin, Beacon, Richmond, Rutgers, Hamden Place, Bank, Howard, Nicliffe, academy, Wilsey, Camden, Littleton, Fairmount.
(10) Warren, Summit, Searing, Bank

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(11) Arch. Lock, Orleans, Colden, Hoyt, Comes Alley, Pierson Place, Bank, Academy, Plane, Campbell ~~Street.~~

(12) Boyden, Sussex, Burnett,

(13) Sheffield, Stone, Summer, Crane, Division, Orange, James,

(14) North 5th - North 6th.

No Negroes lived in Forest Hill, there were none in Roseville, nor Vailsburgh, nor Woodside. The Weequahic section as we now know it was Lyons Farms. It was literally a farm with at least two large dairies and truck farming covering wide areas.

II

How did they earn their living?

A safe guess would be that at least 80% of Negro wage earners were employed in domestic service. For women the percentage would be even higher.

They were cooks, waiters, butlers, valets, coachmen, laundresses, maids, chauffeurs. With but rare exceptions all who worked in industry were just common laborers.

They worked at the Flockhart

Foundry, Coe's Steel, Carnegie Steel, Benjamin Atha Steel, Worthington Pump, leather factories down on the Plank Road and along Frelinghuysen Avenue. Swifts Packing Co Harrison, A few worked in the construction industry and were members of the Hod Carriers Union. There were also two or three carpenters and a like number of bricklayers. These unions admitted negroes to membership. But steamfitters and plumbers, and also the electricians union denied membership to Negroes.

The following had the so-called "good jobs". All of them were messengers, janitors, or a combination of both.
Cornelius Brown, Halsey Francisco were in the City Hall, Jacob King, Firemen's Insurance, Al Fletcher who was perhaps the only male Negro who could operate a typewriter was a real secretary to an insurance company head Mr. Kinnaard National Newark Bank, Howard Staats and Everett Reeves, Howard Bank, Charles

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Banks Fidelity Union. Wm. Van Blake, American Insurance, Charles Ruffin, John P. O'Fake, Mutual Benefit. Allen Bland, Essex County Republican Club. George Jamfer McKinley School. Mr. Nevins, North Ward Bank.

James Miller was paymaster in the Water Department, Joseph H.S. Scotland was the Gaurdian of Mortgages in the Court House. Mr. Warden was the business agent for the Teamsters Union

In business serving Negroes only. a Mrs. Clark, grocery and vegetable store on Spruce Street. a restaurant on Orange Street between Plane and High, John Morgan, a saloon on Academy Street. He lived on Kearney Street. Morgan had an unusual daughter. Brenka, She graduated from Barringer High School, and won a scholarship to Wellesley College, certainly the first Negro girl from Newark to attend a prestigious white school.

There was the Cooks and Waiters Club on Lafayette Street. Allan Bland Jr. and Mrs. A.E. Whittington were in

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real estate. B.F. Ogburn had a little insurance company. Reginald Stewart was the representative of a rather strong insurance company whose headquarters were in Washington.
Mr. Coleman was the policeman. Mr. Sears, and Mr. Williams were mailcarriers. The widow of Mr. Williams is still alive.
There were some Negroes in business to which I want to especially call your attention. They competed with whites and succeeded. For instance, there was C.M. Brown the father of our John Brown. He had a stall in the Center Market. He sold chickens. So successful was he the he obtained the sobriquet "Chicken Brown". John M. Stoute had a printing shop on Academy Street, a Mr. Richardson was a tailor who had a shop just across the street from where we are at this moment. He made clothes for well to do whites. Mary and Frank Anderson had a restaurant and hotel business at 315 Halsey Street. Their patrons were largely Firemen and Policemen. Two upper floors of her three story

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were rented to whites as lodgers.

brick building. Jacob Little had a tea and coffee business. With his horse and wagon he served customers all over the county. Mrs. Little conducted a little store in the basement of their house on Cottage Street. She had a facial disfigurement, the skin twisted to the right, perhaps a minor stroke. Charles Johnson who had a coal business on Congress Street.

John S. Brinkman, Hampden Place, John Booth, Thomas Street, and Fletcher and Sons, New York Avenue, had very successful moving and storage business. Sam Holmes Arch Street, Henry Brown Norfolk Street, Mr. Monroe, Waverly Avenue, these were painters and paper hangers.

Joe Wright, Grant Reeves and Emmett Thomas were caterers. Thomas was a most unusual man. He was totally illiterate, except in writing his name which was not legible. But his brain was phenomenal. He would go to the home of a fine lady to give an estimate on a party. Very handsome, the impression made was favorable,

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He took with him a pad and a half dozen pencils sticking from his coat pocket. As he talked with his prospective employer he would apparently write in the book. The fact was all he did was to make straight marks. But when he left the whole party was in his head. The party was always executed in perfection.

The Professions. Dr. W. W. Wolfe, 319 Mulberry Street, Dr. Wormley, Marshall Street, Dr. W. H. Washington, 23 Orleans Street, Dr. W. R. Granger, Wallace Place.

Dentists - Dr. W. P. Urling, Market Street, W. Kinnard, Thirteenth Avenue, W. R. Ford, Broad Street, near Orange Street.

Nurses. Miss Eva Mulford, Miss Flossie Van Blake, Miss Ida Love.

Teachers, Miss Mae Mulford, Miss Grace Baxter, Miss Addie Garris.

Lawyers. Oliver Randolph, George A. Douglass, John B. Hannard, all with offices on Market Street, near Broad Street.

Undertakers - Harry Brown, Bank Street. David C. Woody, Plane Street.

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'When they went to Church. Began in the [illegible].

'Mt. Zion Baptist – Rev. Brown, minister, Located on [illegible] Street.

The A.M.E.Z. Church was on Clay Street. This is the oldest Negro organization in Newark [illegible]. It is one of the oldest in the country, having been organized either late in the Eighteenth Century, certainly earlier in the Nineteenth Century. It is now known as the Clinton Memorial A.M.E.Z. Church and is on Broadway.

St. James A.M.E. Church was on Union Street. Rev. Allens was its minister. Some of you remember his son, Henry Allen who had a distinguished service in France in World War I. He served as an attendant in the [illegible] Chambers in the Court House until his retirement.

The Thirteenth Avenue Presbyterian Church was on Thirteenth Avenue and [illegible] Street. Its minister was Rev. Eggleston. He had a son Frank who was a schoolmate of mine at [illegible] University.

St. Philips Episcopal Church was on High Street near Kinney Street. Rev. Robert D. Brown was its minister.
Another very old congregation was St. James A.M.E. Church. It was on Jackson Street just [illegible] hundred feet of [illegible] Grove [illegible] Street; Its minister was Rev. Waters. He had a son Paul who also was a school mate of mine at Lincoln.
Israel Memorial A.M.E. Church was on Kinney Street between Prince and Broome.
Bethany Baptist Church was on [illegible] ~~Street~~ Rev. R. D. Wynn was the pastor.
Mt. Calvary Baptist Church was on Eighth Avenue. Rev. W. W. F. [illegible] was the preacher. He was the most cooperative minister with whom I ever worked in my many years as an Urban League Director.
There was a small congregation.
Bethsaida Baptist Church on Stone Street as I remember it.
In Newark, Negroes had a distinct cultural life. Certainly its most distinguished feature was the Sunday Afternoon Lyceum.

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The meetings were held on Sunday afternoons.
They moved from one church to another. The
leader of the cultural group was Mr. ...
[illegible]. There was [illegible] music, both
group and individual. There were [illegible]
from poets, always some one recited
from Paul Laurence Dunbar. His
... The party was a favorite. Mrs. Cook,
the mother of Sally Cook read one of her
latest compositions.

On occasions a Negro with a wide
reputation, invariably a minister, or an
educator would be the guest speaker.
The favorite instrumentalist was Miss
Alta Saunders. She was a [illegible]
on the piano. Indeed, she had been
recognized as a child prodigy, and
was [illegible] when quite young [illegible]

She [illegible] 6 [illegible] for royalty.
There was [illegible] Madame [illegible]
annual [illegible] of her pupils. She [illegible]
on Washington Street near William Street.
She taught music and had many
pupils. Each spring she paraded her
pupils to an eager and waiting
audience in a concert.

We had a newspaper. I seem to remember its name as the Herald. It [illegible] [illegible] us about all the things that were going on among us. The [illegible] and publisher was Mr. Jackson. [illegible] in Montclair. but the office of the paper was on Bank Street. Mrs. [illegible] ran the office. She was a very attractive lady. Though very dark her profile was Arabic rather than African. She was little thin and a figure that [illegible] ones eyes on her.

How we amused ourselves.

In summer there were Olympic Park in Irvington and Dreamland Park down on Frelinghuysen Avenue. If Negroes were admitted to Dreamland at all the entrance fee was double that of whites. We had to go to [illegible] Park in [illegible] and to the Woodland on South Orange Avenue. Also, there were trotting races at Waverly Park. and boating on the Lake in Weequahic Park.

Summer's biggest event was the ex-

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excursion to Riverside Park, [illegible] was done
there a merry-go-round. We went on the
Lehigh Valley Railroad. There was a [illegible]
[illegible] and that on the day of this excursion
not a chicken could be bought in Newark,
for the picnickers had purchased them all
for feasts around the [illegible] [illegible] in
the park.

In winter there was [illegible] [illegible],
We were always glad to go to the [illegible]
[illegible] went in [illegible]. A few went
to the Court or [illegible].

But the real events were the dances
given by Alice McDonald and her
[illegible]. There was [illegible] a [illegible]
[illegible] in the country who was [illegible] than
Alice McDonald. The dances were held in
the Auditorium on Orange Street near
Broad.

Another great winter attraction was the
Annual Ball of the Knights of Pythias.

If we ate [illegible] [illegible] have [illegible] to go
only to Wachholz's, on Market Street near
Broad. To Grant's Lunch, a one
story building on the corner of Plane
and Market Street, a [illegible] lunch

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[illegible] on [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] Streets.
Mrs. A. V. [illegible] a tall and [illegible] [illegible] into everyone's business woman had a Cook [illegible] on [illegible] Street near [illegible] Street.
"We had our [illegible] and organizations.
There was the [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] young men in [illegible]. Our own [illegible] [illegible] a member. They had a Cricket and Basket-ball teams. There were [illegible], Pythians, Masons.
An unique literary club was the Phyllis Wheatley Literary Club. Organized in 1910, it is still a very alive organization. Mrs. [illegible] [illegible] was the founder. With her were Mrs. [illegible] [illegible], Mrs. R. D. Brown, Mrs. W. R. [illegible] Mrs. [illegible] M. [illegible].
There was the [illegible] [illegible] Men's Club. I remember Mr. [illegible], [illegible] [illegible] Mr. [illegible] - [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] - Emmett Thomas, John [illegible] - Lansing [illegible]. [illegible] were the Fan-Tans, [illegible] [illegible] high society, [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible]. An invitation to the

(17) exclusive closed dance given annually by the Fan-Tans was positive proof that one's social status among us was assured.
The women in the Club were beautiful - very beautiful - all of them. Susie Travis, Bertha Cottam, Libby Alexander, Bessie Wolfe, Lottie Cooper, Belle Shearer, Abby Nevins, Emma Wormsley. Grace Baxter, Lillian Johnson.

We had our politicians. What were contemptuously called "little peanut politicians" were numerous. They, like ants in spring, came out making noise just before an election, and disappeared the night the last ballot was cast.
But there were others who played it as a way of life. Asa Gibson, Allen Blake, Sr. John T. Cheschire. Cheschire was an odd one. Always impeccably dressed, he wore a wing collar with an ascot tie, his kid leather shoes shining as if lacquered. No one ever knew

(18) him to do one days work. Yet, he always had a dollar. He lived with Mrs. James Lightfoot on New Street. There all sorts of rumors about that.

I have given you a rather accurate picture of what life was among us up until 1916. Now I want to close with three personal statements.

I

It is time that we disillusioned our youth of a fancy which they accept as fact. They superiorly boast that all the changes in Negro life for the better began only yesterday with them. It is a sad and erroneous illusion. If the house we now occupy is strong, it is because the people I have described to you laid a foundation of solid rock.

II

I believe we should call a halt to the endless emphasis on "blackness". I rush to admit

(19) that identifying it and no longer being ashamed of it has given us a unity and dignity which were so long denied us.
But I also believe that harping upon it without let up is causing us to erect an unscalable fence which will separate us from the other people in the country. Not only would that be wrong, it will inevitably lead to disaster. I shall hear that if it keeps on, I am sure that some Negro went to the supermarket and demanded his pound of pork chops be black, or ~~that~~ he will ~~tell~~ said ~~that~~ unless he can ~~start off~~ tomorrow morning with a black sun in the ~~sky~~ east, don't bother to start the day at all.

III

We are all Newarkers. We live here, we work here or both. Our town is sick. But its illness is not incurable, nor will it die. But we, right ~~here~~

here are its doctors. If it is
(20) to get well, we must write
its prescriptions.